

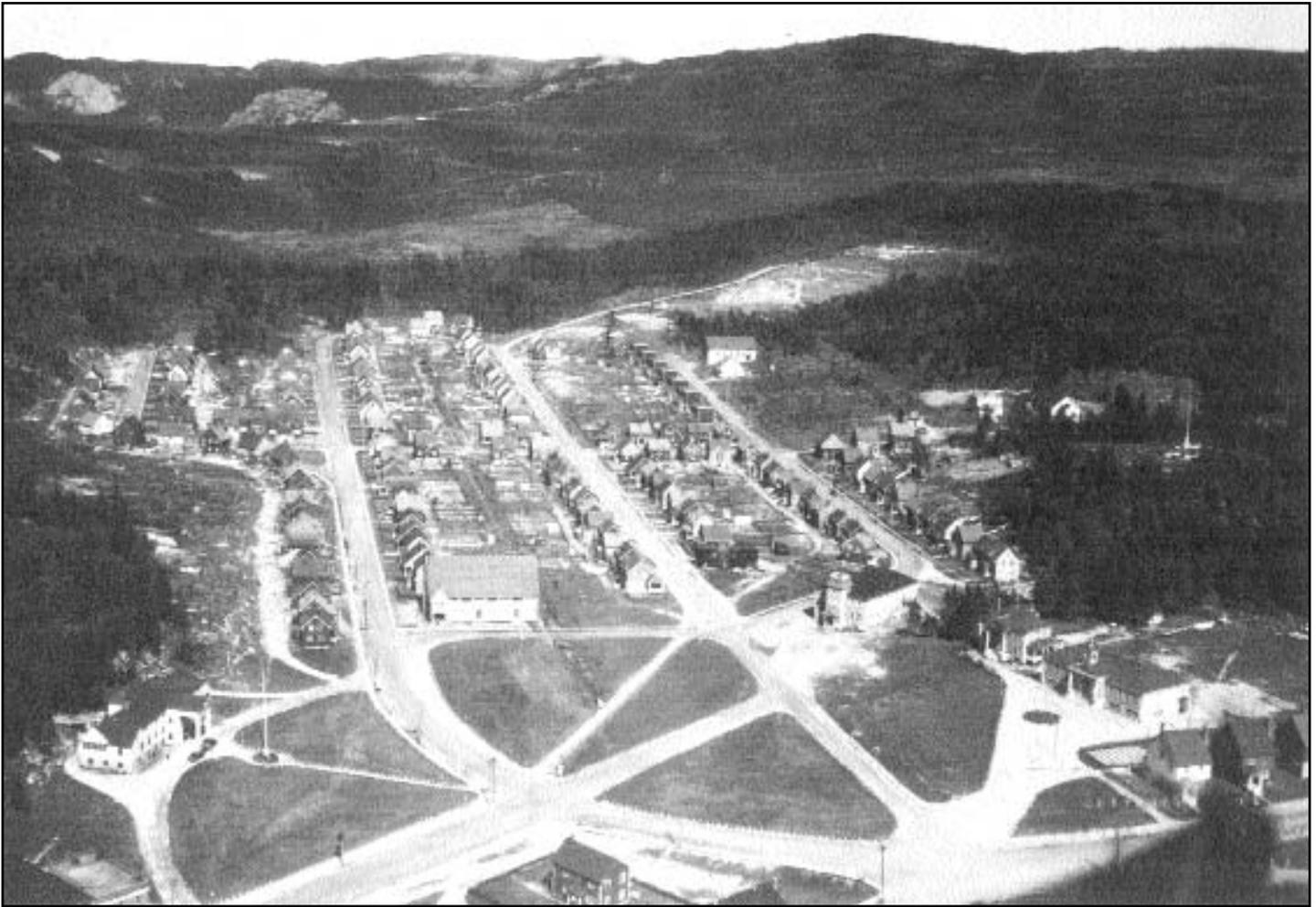
**The Architecture
and Planning
of the
Townsite Development
Corner Brook
1923-5**

Richard Symonds



DEVELOPMENT AT CORNER BROOK-NEWFOUNDLAND FOR
MESSRS SIR W.G. ARMSTRONG, WHITWORTH & CO. LTD
ANDREW R. COBB ARCHT.

MAR. 10
1924



Completed Townsite, late 1920 s

Corner Brook Museum





The intersection of Armstrong Avenue and Reid Street, circa 1925.

Corner Brook Museum



Central Street, April 1925.

Corner Brook Museum



In 1923 Sir Richard Squires, Prime Minister of Newfoundland, and the Reid Newfoundland Company engaged the British firm of Sir W.G. Armstrong, Whitworth and Company. Their task was to oversee the construction of a pulp and paper mill at the mouth of the Humber River and all subsidiary ventures pertaining to the mill's operation. These included a water reservoir; a power station and transmission lines; and an entire town to house future employees of the mill. The region possessed a vast supply of timber for exploitation and the mill was expected to be in operation for a very long time. This expectation of permanence, rare for resource towns of the day, is no doubt the inspiration behind Armstrong Whitworth's decision to enlist the services of two men, a town planner and an architect, both foremost in their fields, to create the Townsite. Thomas Adams (1871-1940), an influential British planner, would lay out the site for which Andrew Randall Cobb (1876-1943) of Halifax would design some 180 houses and civic buildings.

Corner Brook, the area where the mill and town was to be built, had been settled since the middle of

the nineteenth century. The Reid Newfoundland Railway had arrived by 1900 and twenty years later Corner Brook's population was over 1300. By this time the village of Corner Brook (fig.1) had a large saw mill, operated by Christopher Fisher of Halifax; two Roman Catholic churches; a Presbyterian church; and, of course housing. None of these buildings seemed to have survived. They were either destroyed during the mill's construction or in some other way; for example, Fisher's saw mill burned down in the late 1920s

The Newfoundland government believed a pulp and paper industry on the west coast would bolster the poor economy of the area. The Reids, who controlled the timber rights for the area, had much to gain as well. Once Armstrong Whitworth became involved, the government managed to secure enough capital from the Bank of England to begin construction. Armstrong Whitworth were a giant British engineering and manufacturing firm. The company was founded during the Victorian era and rose to prominence as an armaments manufacturer. By the 1920s they were



Figure 1: Corner Brook circa 1920.

Corner Brook Museum



building just about every type of machinery from weapons to hydraulic bridges and electric generators to ships, trains, automobiles and airplanes. Not only did Armstrong Whitworth build the town, mill and power plant, they also manufactured the machinery to equip them.

The planner of the Townsite development, Thomas Adams, was born in Edinburgh, Scotland where he lived and worked as a farmer until moving to London in 1899 to become a freelance writer. While still a farmer, Adams became an advocate for a free market system of land ownership and a more equitable taxation system. Once in London, Adams began to study surveying and thus became interested in the Garden City Movement. In fact, he was appointed the first Secretary of the Garden City Association in 1900. The group was founded by social theorist Sir Ebenezer Howard whose book *To-morrow: A peaceful path to Real Reform*, of 1898, had much influence on the philosophy of the Movement. In an essay on Howard's involvement in the Garden City Movement, Norman Lucey claims *To-morrow: A peaceful path to Real Reform* initiated practical town planning in Great Britain (on-line). Adams was an associate of Howard,

and he would likely have been influenced by Howard's writing.

The plan of the ideal Garden City called for each area to be designed with a specific purpose in mind, whether residential, commercial, or industrial. This segregation of zones, usually separated by green spaces, allowed the development of a healthy and efficient community. The intention was to avoid the health and social problems prevalent in European cities during the nineteenth century, where a usually toxic industrial complex was less than a stone's throw from the workers' cramped housing. In a Garden City, housing would be set back from the tree-lined roads and there would be a garden in front of and behind each home. Adams wrote extensively throughout his career, and nearly a third of his work was concerned with urban housing and how to provide inexpensive working class housing in well-planned residential developments. In the article *City and Town Planning*, from 1930, Adams states how as an art city planning seeks to obtain an economically and socially wholesome arrangement of the ways of communication, of land uses and of buildings and other structures (442).

In an essay published by the University of



Figure 2: Adams plan for Temiscaming, Quebec, 1917.

H. Kalman



Toronto, J.D. Hulchanski states that Adams was probably the first person in England to establish a private planning consulting firm, which he did in 1906 (9). Adams was involved with the planning of several towns in England; he was manager of the First Garden City Company, which created Letchworth; and he was the Town Planning Inspector for the British Government before leaving England in 1914 to work in Canada. From 1914 to 1921 Adams held the position of Advisor on Town Planning to the Commission of Conservation. According to historian Harold Kalman, the Commission was an advisory board established in 1909 by Sir Wilfred Laurier's government to provide information and recommendations on the conservation of human and natural resources (659). As a member of the Commission and a strong proponent of the Garden City Movement, Adams was responsible for the design of many Canadian towns and housing districts -- among them are the complete layout of the pulp and paper mill town of Temiscaming, Quebec in 1917; and the 1918-20 redevelopment of the north end of Halifax that had been destroyed by the harbour explosion a year earlier. Thomas Adams returned to England in 1923 and established a partnership with Longstretch Thompson in Westminster, London. That same year he was commissioned by Armstrong Whitworth to design the Corner Brook Townsite.

When Adams plan for Temiscaming (fig.2) is compared with his plan for Townsite (fig.3) and an aerial photograph of the completed Townsite (fig.4) c.1930's his stylistic tendencies and their development become manifest. In both cases Adams eschewed the conventional grid pattern imposed on many previous resource towns, instead allowing the streets to curve and follow natural topography, creating a relaxed atmosphere. The Garden City Movement hallmark of separating specific zones is evident in both towns. However in Townsite, designed six years after Temiscaming, Adams has pushed this concept even further. Townsite is less cohesive as a single entity than Temiscaming, as the different zones are more boldly defined and separated by expansive green spaces and wooded areas.

In the above mentioned aerial photograph of Townsite, it is clear how Adams based his design, spatially, on the natural topography and on the predetermined location of the mill -- upper left. He placed the commercial enterprises and public buildings in a linear pattern starting near and leading away from the mill -- down, toward centre. Framed by public buildings, such as the hospital and theatre, is an open green

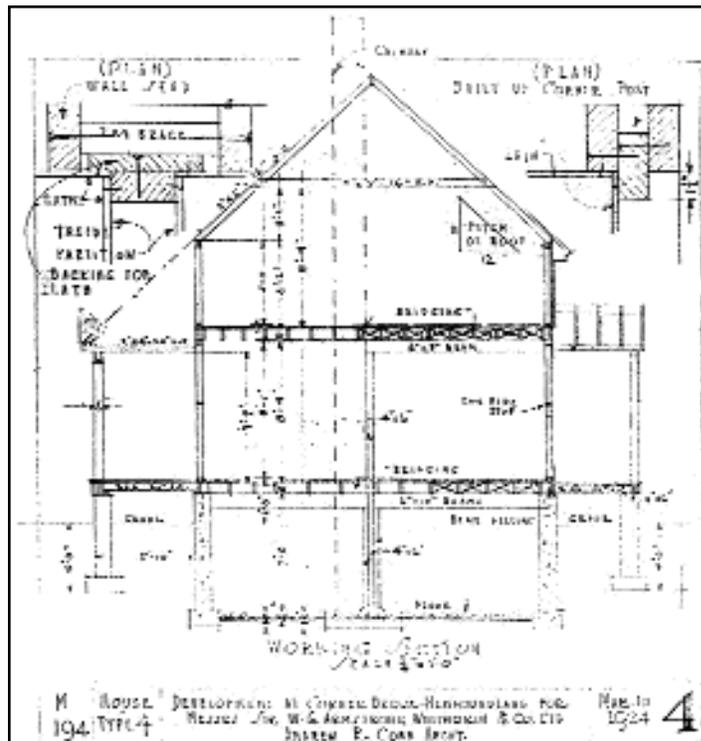


Figure 5: Working section.

Bowater Collection, PANL

space -- centre -- which serves as the interchange of sorts for the two residential areas. Housing for skilled tradesmen and lower management is located right of centre, and housing for the upper management and professionals is located in the lower left of the photograph. There is also the Company's executive guest house (The Glymill Inn) which faces away from the entire development, along with the mill manager's residence (Corner Brook House), toward a man-made pond -- left of centre.

The one major flaw in the design of Townsite was not a fault of Adams, rather a function of the socially stratified, industrial society which made the development possible. The town was intended from the outset to house only middle and upper class employees, with the remainder of people who made up the majority left to house themselves. No roads were built, nor were municipal services, such as water and sewer, offered to these squatters; and they were not permitted to build too close to the Townsite. The consequent free ranging settlement of the working class in Corner Brook is the reason for the haphazard appearance of the town's west end.

Thomas Adams' greatest achievements are evident in the subtlety of his design. A careful study of the organic appearance of Townsite will show how the environment has been manipulated in ways not intended to be consciously noticed by residents. For



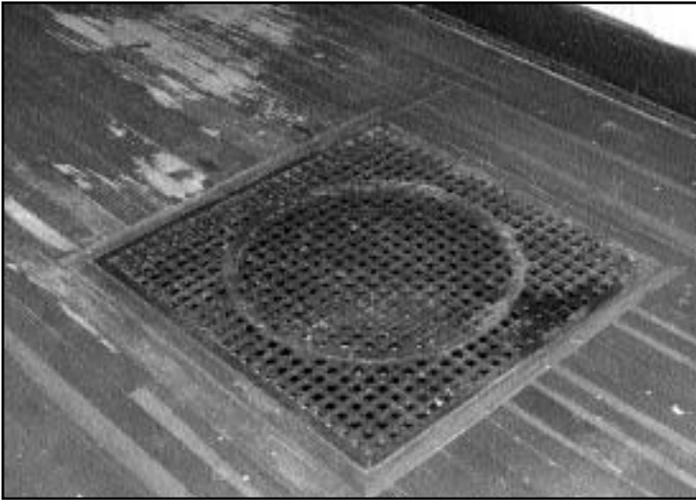


Figure 6: Floor register .

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example, each street has a house or building aligned with its central axis at intersections or turns, so the eyes of the viewer looking straight along a street always fall on the facade of a structure, rather than on the spaces in between. Adams plan for Townsite, based upon order within irregularity, created a visually interesting and picturesque setting for architect Andrew Cobb s designs, which were inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Andrew Cobb was born in Brooklyn, New York and moved to rural Nova Scotia as a boy. He first attended Acadia University and was awarded a scholarship to the School of Architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston where he earned a masters degree in 1904. After graduation, Cobb began working for an architectural firm in Cleveland, Ohio. Three years later he enrolled for further training in the world renowned Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Cobb was given a firm grounding in classical theory and developed a well honed skill in rendering the measured drawing. According to curator Jean Weir, in a publication for the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Cobb was very successful at the Ecole: he was ranked ninth in a class of sixty and had his drawings hung first in line at an exhibition of work from several hundred competitors (3).

After completing his studies and traveling extensively in Europe, Cobb settled in Halifax and opened a practice with Sydney Dumaesq in 1909, which was dissolved amicably after three years. Andrew Cobb was Halifax s first professionally trained architect. He received many private and public commissions in Nova Scotia before accepting Armstrong Whitworth s Townsite project. Among them was the expansion of Dalhousie University, begun in 1913,

with Frank Darling of Toronto as consulting architect. The project entailed the design of the MacDonald Library; the Science Building; and the Arts Building — all executed in the Georgian Classical Style.

When it came to domestic structures, Cobb s signature style was the Craftsman type. Typical features of his Nova Scotia houses are their shingled exterior, steeply pitched roofs, dormer windows, and verandas under an extended roof overhang supported by squared posts. Cobb built many Craftsman homes in Halifax prior to his accepting Armstrong Whitworth s commission. This style of housing evolved from the Arts and Crafts Movement which has its origins in late nineteenth century Britain.

The writings of the English art and social critic John Ruskin were an early influence leading toward the establishment of the Arts and Crafts Movement. In his book *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), Ruskin denounces the use of mechanical production to replace hand craftsmanship in architecture and advocates naturalism and honesty in both design and materials (Kalman 619). Other leading theorists of the Movement were William Morris, C.R. Ashbee, and W .R. Lethaby, all of whom had trained as architects and worked toward unity in the arts. According to Elizabeth Cumming in her treatise *The Arts and Crafts Movement*, their aim was to re-establish a harmony between architect, designer and craftsman and to bring handcraftsmanship to the production of well designed, affordable, everyday objects (6).

Ironically, the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain flourished in an age of industrial advancement and prosperity. Architects of the Movement depended on commissions from wealthy clients who were often industrialists. An appropriate sense of irony is present



Figure 7: Kitchen sink.

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Figure 8: Type-4 houses.

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Figure 9: Type-2 houses, 1925.

Corner Brook Museum

in Cobb's application of the Arts and Crafts ideology to the completely contrived, industrially inspired Townsite development, though Cobb would most likely have considered himself true to the movement's ideals.

Arts and Crafts Style buildings were conceived as individual expressions of design, drawing inspiration from the past but not imitating historical models. Buildings were crafted of local materials and designed to fit the landscape and reflect vernacular traditions. The houses built in Townsite, to Andrew Cobb's specifications, used local materials wherever possible. Spruce was used for the timber framing, boarding, and some clapboards -- others are local pine. The shingles for the majority of the exterior walls were sawn (not split) from spruce logs at a mill in the Codroy Valley about eighty kilometers southwest of Corner Brook. Birch was used for flooring and stairs, as well as some doors. In fact, the only wood imported for the Townsite houses was British Columbian fir, used for large beams, low-grade flooring, doors, and mouldings; and oak for flooring in the executive houses.

In keeping with the overall attitude of permanence surrounding the project, the Townsite houses were very well built. The construction of a typical house is illustrated in Cobb's working section (fig.5) for a type-4 house. All the houses in Townsite have full concrete basements and a double layer of wood on each floor above. A typical exterior wall consists of plaster and lathe on the inward facing side of the studded frame with a layer of boarding covered with Cabot's Quilt then shingles or clapboard on the outward facing side. Cabot's Quilt was a type of insulation, imported from Boston, which had been made from eel's grass (sea weed) woven into batts and wrapped in paper.

The houses possessed many modern conveniences never seen before on Newfoundland's west coast. They all had electric lights; running water; indoor flushing toilets; and enameled, cast-iron bathtubs. Some smaller houses and many of the larger



Figure 10: Type-3 houses.

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Figure 11: Type-1 house.

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Figure 12: North Hills, Nova Scotia.

H. Kalman

ones had a hot-water radiation heating system with cast-iron radiators in each room. However most houses had a coal-fired pipeless furnace, (which was basically a galvanized steel drum with a firebox inside), that heated air which would rise through registers (fig.6) or grates in the floor above.

A typical kitchen was equipped with a coal-burning oven and attached water-heater; a large double sink (fig.7); built in cupboards; and a pantry in a small back porch. An Armstrong Whitworth employee and sometimes social critic, H.G. Ogden, offers contemporary commentary on a possible design consideration of Cobb's. In his book of satirical verse, *Ballads of Corner Brook* (1925), Ogden imagines the Architect saying: I've heard it said that cooking makes/ Some housewives run to fat--/ The kitchens then in all the fours / Will take up half the flat,/ And furnish space for exercise,/ An antidote to that (11).

The fours refers to the complex number/letter system Cobb used to categorize his plans. There are four basic types, which were numbered, each with several variations assigned a letter. So the plans have labels such as: type-4j, type-3a, or type-2mr, and so on. An r as a second letter meant the plan was reversed. The type-4 was the most common house, with the greatest number of variations -- nearly twenty. All type-4 houses (fig.8) are the same basic shape and size with variations including: reversed floor plans; roof design; attic development; window placement; exterior finishes; porch locations; orientation on the site; and interior staircase placement. Cobb even designed a limited number of type-4 duplexes; three of which were built on Armstrong Avenue in 1924. The type-4 houses were intended for skilled tradesmen, foremen, or clerical staff, and were clustered together with only a few type-2 houses interspersed.

The remainder of type-2 houses (fig.9) were situated on Park Street, shown in this 1925 photograph. For reasons unknown, the Park Street houses were referred to as type-3 on plans from 1923; but were classified as type-2 designs by the time construction began in 1924. There were several variations of the type-2 house, though all are two-and-a-half storey dwellings with central chimneys. These houses were probably intended for lower-management or personnel of a similar rank, as they are somewhat larger than the type-4s.

The type-3 houses (fig.10), intended for company management or professionals, is basically a taller version of the type-2 floor plan with an even steeper pitched roof; large developed attic; and two chimneys. There is little variation amongst these houses and only six seem to have been built, all on West Valley Road. The type-3s have the highest level of interior trim of all the house types, even compared to the type-1 house (fig.11), which was the largest design. Type-1 houses were reserved for high-level management or company executives. There are a few variations of the type-1 which, according to Thomas Adams plan, were built on large lots in a forested area away from the rest of Townsite.

One tenet of the Arts and Crafts Movement was that buildings should reflect the vernacular tradition of the location. While Andrew Cobb did reside in Corner Brook for two years during the construction of Townsite, it is highly probable that he began his designs before visiting the area. Growing up in rural Nova Scotia, Cobb would have been very familiar with the vernacular house form known as the Cape Cod cottage. The design had originated in Massachusetts and was commonly used in Nova Scotia during the



Figure 13: 28 East Valley Road.

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eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; but was practically unheard of in Newfoundland. Cobb's mother was from Granville Ferry, Nova Scotia, which is home to many Cape Cod cottages such as North Hills (fig.12), c.1780 s. When North Hills is compared to one of Cobb's type-4 houses 28 East Valley Road (fig.13), built in 1924, the similarities are striking. For all intents and purposes 28 East Valley Road is a Cape Cod cottage with the addition of a covered porch — a feature found on every Townsite house. Like North Hills, it is a one-and-a-half storey, timber-frame structure with a steep gable roof. Both buildings have symmetrical facades with a central entrance; similarly sized and placed sash windows; and wood shingle cladding. A less obvious feature Cobb's Townsite houses share with the Cape Cod form is the upper storey floor level and the height of the shallow eave in relation to the facade and windows.

Another feature of vernacular buildings in Nova Scotia that Andrew Cobb would have been quite familiar with was the gambrel roof, a common feature there since the mid-eighteenth century. A gambrel roof consists of two sides with two planes on each side, the lower one steeper. Cobb designed some of the Townsite houses with gambrel roofs; they appear as a variation on houses type-1 and type-2. Built in 1924, 69 Park Street (fig.14), is a gambrel roofed variation of the type-2 design. In 1925 the development had been criticized by H.G. Ogden, who points out how the patterns of these domiciles/ Don't vary much in style (10). This complaint was likely shared by many and one can assume the gambrel roofs were added to break the monotony of gable roofed houses; (though out of some 180, only a dozen or so did not have gable roofs). There is also evidence, in Cobb's



Figure 15: 40 East Valley Road.

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surviving drawings, that the architect revised plans to suit a future tenant. The plan of a type-4 house to be located at 43 Reid Street shows a partition being added to the kitchen and the location of the sink and drain board being changed at the request of the tenant, W.A. King.

It seems Cobb may also have designed a few unique houses, such as 40 East Valley Road (fig.15) 1924-5, that were placed amongst the regular types. In a plan of Townsite from June 1924 showing the location and type of each house, these unique houses are labeled with a question mark. It is known that these houses were built during the first development of the town, and they do appear to be of Cobb's design; however, there is no proof they are his. The Majestic Theatre, a concrete structure built during the 1920 s, is another building matching Cobb's style that may or may not have been designed by him.

Jean Weir suggests Andrew Cobb had no consultant or associate to assist him during the Townsite project (37). However, existing plans prove otherwise. A plan for a Salvation Army House, dated July 23, 1925, is labeled redrawn from Mr. Cummings design, approved, A.R. Cobb, archt. Also, plans for the row housing on West Street (fig.16) that are attributed to Cobb, and very much resemble his designs, are signed W.W.C., dated 1928, and are drawn on



Figure 14: 69 Park Street.

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Figure 16: West Street, c.1940 s

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Newfoundland Power & Paper Co. letterhead. Almost all of the other house plans are on Andrew Cobb's letterhead. To what degree and in what capacity Mr. Cummings or W.W.C. were involved in the Townsite project is unknown. Whether or not they are the same person, the existence of these plans prove that at least one other architect or draftsman worked along side Cobb, designing Townsite buildings in Cobb's style.

A popular architectural style in Canada at the time of the Townsite development was the Tudor Revival. Buildings of this style, which had evolved from the Arts and Crafts Movement, usually featured brick exteriors with accents or large areas of mock half-timbering; squared posts; massive roofs; and tall brick chimneys. Andrew Cobb designed two buildings in this style for Townsite: Sir W.G. Armstrong's residence, Corner Brook House, 1924-5; and the Glymill Inn of 1924.

Corner Brook House (fig.17), the largest in Townsite, is an expansive variation of the type-1 design with a projecting frontispiece, large sun room and a two-storey wing for the kitchen and servant's quarters. Sir W.G. Armstrong never did reside at Corner Brook House. In fact, Armstrong's visits to Townsite were so infrequent that it was decided the house would be the General Manager's residence instead. The Glymill Inn (fig.18), shown shortly after its completion in this photograph, was the largest building Cobb designed for Corner Brook. The three-and-a-half storey structure has a brick basement and first floor with half-timbered upper floors so indicative of the Tudor Revival Style. The Glymill Inn was used as a staff house during the construction of Townsite and later served as an executive guest house and hotel. The building has been much altered during the past seventy-seven years causing some confusion over what features are from Cobb's original design.

Perhaps the most peculiar feature of the Glymill is the green colour of the half-timbering. The conventional Tudor Revivalist colour would have been black or dark brown, to imitate English oak. The Glymill has been painted green for as long as anyone living can remember; however, in black & white photographs taken during the 1920s the paint does not appear to be green. As well, the half-timbering of Corner Brook House was always painted dark brown. The Glymill Inn was heavily damaged by fire in January of 1929 (fig.19) and major rebuilding took place that year which would have had to include a repainting of the exterior. In 1929 the buildings of Townsite were owned by the International Power and Paper Company, of New York, whose corporate logo-type was coloured green.

The front entrance has also been greatly altered from its original state. In the 1926 photograph (fig.22) there are wooden stairs leading up to an enclosed veranda. It is unclear whether the veranda is enclosed by glass or a mesh screen, though screening is most likely as flies were a constant nuisance during the construction phase. As well, the wooden balustrade of the veranda is continued down each side of the stairs toward a large squared newel post. In the 1929 photograph (fig.23), the main entrance is a single door in an angled, three-sided frontispiece. Today the front entrance (fig.20) of the Glymill is quite different: the stairs are concrete and brick; there is no screening of any type; the frontispiece has been widened and made rectangular; and the single door has been replaced by multi-paned double doors with large sidelights and a transom. Other alterations to the Glymill Inn include a rebuilding of the attic storey to provide higher ceilings; a large modern extension to the rear of the building; and a renovation of the main lobby which has seen the removal of the original stair-



Figure 17: Corner Brook House, c.1920 s

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Figure 18: Glymill Inn, c.1925-6.

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case and reception desk.

Andrew Cobb was commissioned by Armstrong Whitworth to design not only housing, but many other buildings in the town. The three most prominent public buildings by Cobb were the Goodyear and House Building, 1924-5; Corner Brook Public School (fig.21), 1925; and the company Hospital, 1924-5. The Goodyear and House Building, which was a large general store, is still in use today, but is altered beyond recognition. The school was extended in 1932 with the addition of a second projecting bay and wing (to the right in the photograph); later damaged by fire; then destroyed in the 1960s to make way for a Holiday Inn. Cobb submitted three designs for the school, all with Classical elements. Though the school was built of wood, Cobb's final extant design called for a concrete building. The

hospital was an odd blend of Cobb's Craftsman houses and Classical forms; having clapboard sheathing, a steeply pitched roof, and a Doric portico complete with pediment. The hospital has since been destroyed. Other buildings by Cobb that have been destroyed include: a Salvation Army Church; a Laundry; and several Poultry Houses. As well, Andrew Cobb completed plans for a large four storey boarding house and a combination Fire station, Auditorium and Town Hall building, executed in the Classical Style, that were never built.

Thomas Adams and Andrew Cobb's vision of Townsite has survived almost eighty years more or less intact. Inevitably, several buildings have been destroyed and other, modern buildings added where

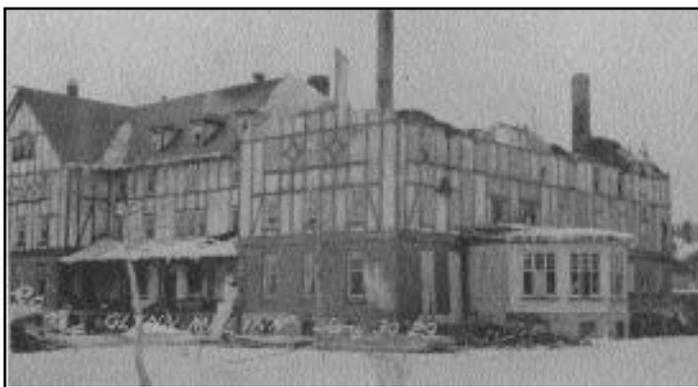


Figure 19: Fire damage, 1929.

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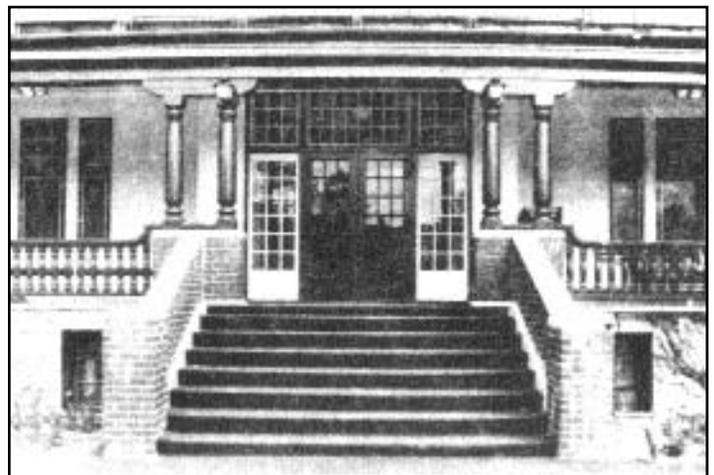


Figure 20: Front entrance.

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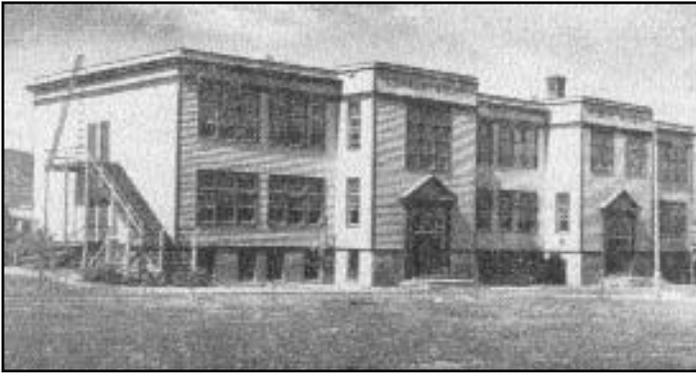


Figure 20: Public school, c.1930 s

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none were intended; but Adams plan has endured. Most of the numerous trees planted during the creation of this Garden City inspired town remain. The segregated zones established during the initial development are relatively unchanged — the residential, commercial and industrial areas remain separate. The public green spaces have suffered the most, as they have been greatly reduced by parking lots and other development. Andrew Cobb's Arts and Crafts houses were built to last, and almost all have survived with the unfortunate exception of the Park Street type-2 s: only six of the original thirteen remain. Most of Cobb's other designs have been altered to varying degrees. Extensions have been built, windows replaced, and, most often, new siding has been installed. However, there are enough Cobb houses that remain unaltered to give a fair impression of the original Townsite, which survives to this day, structurally, if not stylistically.

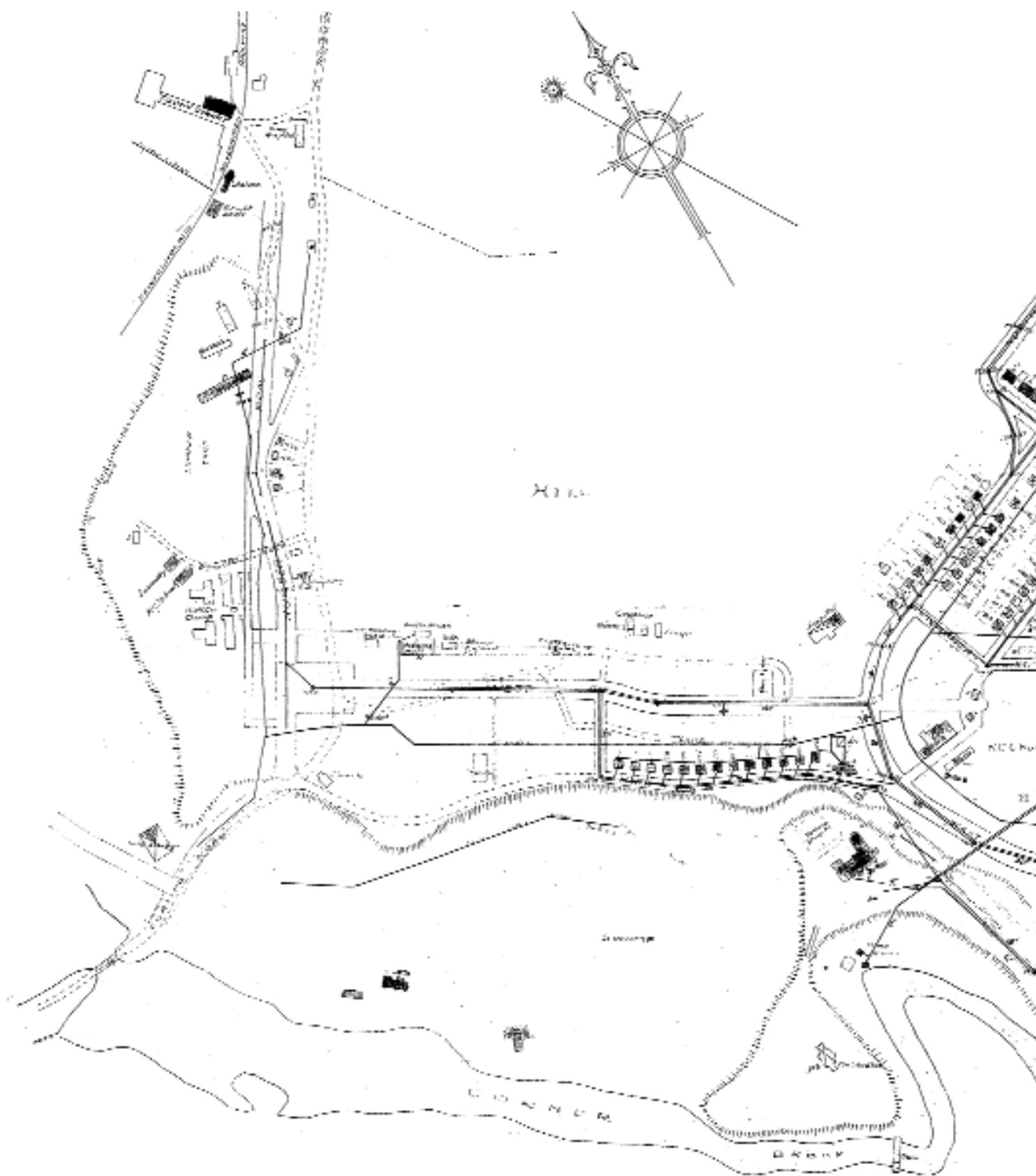
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Glymill Inn, April 1924.

Corner Brook Museum





colophon

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